

# NUS to ramp up Asian focus

THE National University of Singapore (NUS) is setting its sights on becoming the premier centre for research and knowledge on Asia.

It wants to ride on Asia's rise and find solutions to challenges that the region faces, such as environmental sustainability and the impact of urbanisation.

Making his first State of the University address yesterday as NUS president, Professor Tan Chorh Chuan told his audience of staff, students and alumni just how he intends to have research done differently to achieve this.

Last month, NUS set up the Global-Asia Institute, which identified some Asia-centric research themes to work on for a start, such as how Asian cities under pressure of urbanisation should tackle education and public-health issues.

Early next year, another research cluster on environmental sustainability will be formed. Along with three clusters already set up in finance and risk management, biomedical sciences and translational clinical research and ageing, these groups will be researching solutions to real-world problems.

Prof Tan also spoke on the need to move resources to where they were required and to extend the university's global reach.

His speech follows on the vision he had set out for NUS in January – for it to become an international university with a unique Asian flavour.

He peppered his speech with stories about his trek in the Indian Himalayas and the lessons he drew from them.

He said that despite the zigzag routes and saw-tooth climbs, he realised he could not stop to rest if he were to reach the top. Likewise, the NUS cannot afford to “take a breather” if it wants to scale new heights in a changed world.

And like trekkers, NUS must stay nimble with a great administrative system, or risk “being washed down a gushing stream...or left far behind”.

To illustrate the rapid change that has swept through Asia, he gave the examples of how huts in remote villages he saw on his trek had satellite dishes and solar panels, and how his trek leader kept up with cricket scores with his solar-powered cell-phone.

Competition for faculty talent in Asia, especially from Chinese and Korean universities, is hotting up, he noted. To attract and retain faculty members, NUS will launch a staff-development programme this year to give promising staff development opportunities, including training stints abroad.

NUS will also extend its global reach by setting up colleges in Asia and the Middle East to add to its existing network of six colleges; it will also establish research centres in India and China.

He said: “The changed world and the rise of Asia present unique opportunities for NUS to make a quantum leap to become a leading global university...We have what it takes to succeed.”